
Commercialisation of Primary Education: A Negative Influence to Nigeria's National Development

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Abstract

The present economic meltdown in Nigeria has elicited concerns from well-meaning Nigerians, mainly the academia, as they have continued to understudy the best ways to help the country out of recession. Privatisation of education which ushered in commercialisation of education, especially at the primary level, has been identified as a major factor which has added a heavy toll on the Nigeria's dwindling economy. That has, for instance, led to many cases of school dropouts since many parents can no longer afford the heavy financial burdens of their children's education. Consequently, these dropouts become social misfits who constitute a major bloc against national development. Using library and field research method, this paper x-rayed the various methods utilised by the proprietors to "milk" the poor parents and the impacts of commercialisation of primary education to national development. It concluded that unless government becomes alive to its main responsibility of providing education for majority of her citizens, the Nigerian economy will continue to dwindle. Thus, seeing primary education as a fundamental human right, the work recommended that government should completely take over the sponsorship cum management of primary education and abolish all forms of privatisation at that level.

Keywords: Primary education, Commercialisation, Privatisation, National development.

In the good old days – prior to Nigeria’s independence and down to the 1970s – education in Nigeria witnessed glorious moments. This was when education was controlled by the colonialists and when their influences had not finally waned. The very few private institutions then saw the Mission Schools as role models and competed with them such that quality was never compromised. A standard six “graduate” then could successfully do many things required of an educated person – including teaching. Comparing the situation then with what is happening today, Duze (2011:803-4) observed that her grand-mother “a school teacher with only primary six certificate ... could read and write better in excellent English than many university graduates of today”. Indeed, then, nobody could dare say that the standard of education was falling.

The exit of the colonial masters saw the abolition of their 8-5-3-2- structure by the Nigerian authorities who took over the policy formation and sponsorship of her educational system. Thus, the *standard*, as it were in the primary system, gave way for *elementary (primary)* system. Hence the 6-5-2-3 and much later the 6-3-3-4 systems were introduced. At a time, government became unable to adequately bear the financial burden of education. Indiscipline, ineffective teaching and learning, corruption and sundry negative issues occasioned by poor management of the system became the new order. These no doubt, ushered in gradual erosion of the quality of education.

Today, it is no longer news that the standard/quality of education in Nigeria has fallen. Many scholars attest to this fact (Okoroma, 2007; Duze, 2011; Tanko, 2013; Amadi, 2017 to name a few). Amadi (2017:210) explains that one evidence of the fallen standard of education can be seen from “the quality of English used amongst our students/graduates”. Furthermore, Okoroma (2007:67), quoting Ralua (1989), observed that “The primary schools have virtually decayed.... In the circumstance, the quality of the educational services... has fallen”.

The researchers, therefore, posit that poor primary educational base, occasioned by observable decays at that level, constitutes the major impetus to the fallen standard of education in Nigeria. This paper therefore x-rays the major factors that led to poor primary educational base, of which commercialisation of education is a focal point, the impacts of that in Nigeria’s dwindling economy, and suggestions that could help check the ugly trends.

The concepts of education and commercialisation vis-à-vis privatization need to be addressed since they are relevant to the discourse. That is done in the following sections.

The Concept of Education

Education, in its entirety, is the acquisition of knowledge towards the development of an individual’s character and mental powers. It aims ultimately at the restoration of human dignity and self-actualisation. According to Bamgbose (1991:62), education “is a means of upward social mobility, manpower training and development in its widest sense of full realisation of human potential and the nation’s resources for

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the benefit of all". This process of knowledge acquisition begins from childhood and ends at death.

Education is indeed, a life-long affair. Uduk (2017:1) notes that the aim of life-long education is "not just to enhance social inclusion but for one to be a proactive citizen, improve personal development and become self-sustained in life". Nevertheless, the process of formal education begins from the primary level (schools), nay pre-primary as is obtainable today. Stressing the importance of childhood education, Lawal (2017:12) notes that "for a child ... to grow into a useful, intelligent and mature adult, he/she must be carefully nourished and groomed by the society right from early childhood". It is, therefore, imperative that a very good foundation be laid at this level in order to guarantee successful higher levels. Unfortunately, this solid foundation is seemingly elusive as a result of the influences of educational commercialization.

Education freed human beings from the state of nature where man was brutish, nasty and savagery. Education reforms human beings and brings enlightenment on ways of doing things and associating with fellow humans. It is through education that humans are aware of their inalienable rights and can engage in self-developmental efforts for themselves and the upliftment of their various nations. Its acquisition accords individuals respect, elevation in social status, government employment or self employment. This is the reason people invest so much resources for educational acquisition. Sadly enough, in a recessed and dwindling economy such as is prevalent in Nigeria today, people can no longer afford the high costs of education occasioned by privatisation. The effects, of course, affect meaningful development.

Considering the enormous advantage of education, one would have hoped that the government, as part of its social responsibilities to the citizenry, should have taken full responsibility of its sponsorship especially at the primary level. But, this was not to be. By shirking its responsibility, government privatised education at all levels hence providing the platform for commercialisation of education. This situation brought opportunities for proprietors to sap the parents and guardians raring to make their children access education. This of course, has enormous influence as it, at the long run, impedes national development. Let us, in the following sections understudy the notion of commercialisation of education, reasons of commercialisation, patterns of exploitation in a commercialised education and the attendant effects.

Commercialisation of Education: Meaning

According to Borgohain (2016:71), "Commercialization is a process by which a new product or service is introduced into the general market." In Nigeria the decision by the government to privatise education provided opportunities for this *process* to flourish hence education became commercialised.

Commercialisation of education is the attachment of monetary value, in any form or shape, in the delivery of education. The ultimate aim is to manipulate and exploit those who are desirous of having education in order to make huge profits. According to

commercialisation of education is “a process of private ownership and management of educational institutions whereby, investments are made with the motive of earning profits”. This is done at the expense of educational quality and standard. Both Borgohain (2016: 71-2), Anwar and Saha (2017:202) corroborate this fact thus: “Commercialisation of education is a trend of decreasing emphasis on the humanities It is a tendency which gives emphasis to make education profitable as well as business oriented”. Anwar and Saha (2017:201) further note that a commercial education system “manufactures solipsists but does not nurture altruists”. This trend is capable of retarding development contrary to the aims of acquiring education.

It must be pointed out that commercialisation of education has far-reaching negative consequences (discussed later). However, one of the perceived reasons for privatising education in Nigeria was to provide enough opportunities for her teeming population to access education. But in practical terms, privatisation of education, with its attendant commercialisation, has the capacity of stopping many people from accessing education. Citing Les-Leba (2014), Twebaze (2015: 5098) presents the picture thus:

If youth education is left solely in the hands of entrepreneurs, the basic right to education may only be available to the small elite class who can afford it while the majority of citizens who are financially challenged will remain uneducated and become social liabilities.

These liabilities will surely be inimical to national growth.

Reasons for Commercialisation of Education

Commercialisation of education in Nigeria started as a result of the federal and state governments’ inability to provide adequate funds for primary, secondary and tertiary education. This means that government failed to fund effectively, manage and maintain the schools. Therefore, in view of the teeming population yearning for education and in consideration of its failure to meet the demand, government privatised education. This liberal posture to it brought many businessmen and women who joined, took over the running of education and, of course, turned it to a business venture.

Privatisation of education, therefore, allowed individuals, religious bodies, non-governmental organisations etc. - whether knowledgeable or not in terms of academic planning – to establish and run academic institutions. The parents, relations, guardians, indeed the masses, bear the burden of payment of so many fees and other things attached (discussed later) instead of the government.

Furthermore, incessant strikes and disruption of the academic calendar, an effect from poor funding with its attendant poor working conditions added a heavy toll on the public (government) educational system. As many teachers became lackadaisical in discharging their duties, pupils and students became more demoralised in pursuit of academic brilliance. The system thus, affected the quality and standard of education as it turned out half-baked graduates who are not well grounded to go to the next level of

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education. Expectedly, the proprietors, like every good entrepreneur, cashed into this opportunity and promised, as it were, to remedy the situation. But this was never to be!

Another major factor which has sustained the establishment of private schools, especially at the primary level, is the fact that government failed to monitor and supervise those existing. Arong and Ogbadu (2010:184) attest to this fact and noted that "the whole blame (of the fallen standard of education) is on the lack of adequate educational inspection and supervision in our educational system especially at the primary / secondary school levels" (bracket, ours). Today, there are mushrooms nursery and primary schools in every nook and cranny of almost every community in Nigeria. Sadly, most of these private schools do not have trained and qualified teachers. The proprietors, in view of their profit-making orientation, go for cheap, untrained and sometimes, non-certificated secondary school leavers as teachers. Even when a few qualified ones are employed, they are made to teach subjects not within their areas of specialisation. The result is that the country has so many pupils leaving the primary schools without the basic ingredients to cope with other higher levels.

At this juncture, it becomes imperative to x-ray the various forms which commercialisation of education has taken in order to exploit the society. This is presented in the following section:

Methods of Exploitation in Commercialised Education

It has already been established that commercialisation of education entails attachment of monetary values to every service rendered by the proprietors in the educational system. Since the proprietors, like every business person, are positioned to make profits, they have gone out of their ways to design strategies aimed at exploiting the system to ensure maximum profits. The measures include (but never in any way limited to) the following ways:

a. **Tuition and ancillary fees:** The tuition and ancillary (other) fees in most of the pre-nursery (crèche), nursery and primary schools are to say the least, outrageous. The cheapest rate obtainable, even in the rural areas is about twenty thousand naira (N20,000.00). Some of the ancillary fees include:

i. **Parent-Teachers' Association (PTA) levies:** Funny enough, most parents do not know how these funds are managed or utilised.

ii. **Outrageous examinations (e.g. Common entrance, F.S.L.C) fees.** Most of the private schools do not have these examinations centres. They thus, register their pupils in other schools and hide under such umbrellas to charge higher fees.

iii. **Graduation fees:** It has become an annual ritual that ceremonies would be hosted to send off (forth) pupils who have completed their duration of studies in a said school. The said pupils and even the junior ones who are said to be supporting the graduating ones, are charged highly with the intention of making gains after the ceremony.

iv. **Continuation class (lesson) fees:** In this regard, the teachers tactically avoid the normal class periods, or fail to teach important topics then but shift them to the

continuation classes. This is to coerce the pupils to attend. The classes have now been extended to even pupils in basic four instead of the graduating (basic six) class. Equally the fees are high.

v. **Excursion fees:** Now, it has become mandatory that the pupils will be taken out on excursion once or twice per term. When the high fees for that are collected, they are taken to substandard or nearer places with perhaps, no useful educational values in order to maximise profit.

vi. **Appreciation levies to teachers:** This originally takes the form of optional ways of motivating the teachers, but usually ends as compulsory levies. Once started, it then becomes a tradition. Ironically, one wonders, after all the payments made, how parents should again be charged for appreciating teachers instead of the school proprietors shouldering such responsibilities.

vii. **“Free will” donations:** Equally, parents are coerced into “free will” donations. Usually, the proprietors introduce a certain project such as provision of new buses, equipping the laboratory or entirely building a new house, or buying of land “to relocate the school to a conducive environment” and so on. Parents are therefore manipulated to donate so as to enhance the smooth-running of the schools.

It is needless to state that the outlined fees are mandatory despite the fact that parents are not consulted before the amount in each case is determined. It is equally sad to observe that these imposed fees are not in any way commensurate with the quality of education delivered to the people. In that regard, in order to cover their inadequacies, some schools prepare two results – the original and the doctored ones. In the doctored ones, grades of the pupils are adjusted so as to impress the parents to retain their patronage.

b. **Transport Scheme:** Most private schools have introduced transport schemes as another way of “milking” parents. The charges are equally high, even as their services are very poor. The drivers, on instructions from the proprietors, over-load the buses; in fact, pack the little children as sardines and iced fish without any iota of concern about their comfort. Most of the schools operate with one or two buses that will continue to run till even 9.00am, when normal studies should have commenced. The return journey is surely stressful and lately. In some cases, the buses do not ply the roads for some days or even weeks, on excuses that they have broken down. No refunds, whatsoever, are made to parents.

c. **School wears/dresses:** Originally, in government / public schools, two basic school uniforms - school and day wears – existed. It was the option of a given parent to sew two or more wears for his ward(s), depending on availability of funds. Commercialisation which has left education in private hands has now changed the trend. What is practicable is that schools now have main school uniform, day dress, physical exercise (P.E.) wears, character count wears, cardigan, inter-house sports wears, sandals, shoes and canvasses with different colours of socks to match as different days and occasions demand. Since the motive is to make profit, the parents are forbidden from buying or sewing these wears outside (in the open market). They are

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mandated to buy from the school shops at prices which triple the rate obtainable in the open market. Very humane proprietors would manage to explain that the essence is “to maintain the same colour and style”. What a loose reason for a stringent imposition!

d. **Text and Exercise books:** This is another conduit pipe through which proprietors extort money from the parents. The *modus operandus* is that more than really required text and exercise books are recommended. Then prices higher than would have been in the market are fixed and the parents are mandated to buy from the schools' bookshops. The books are stamped and the names of the pupils who bought them are written in a register. This is to ensure absolute compliance.

e. **Removal / monetisation of handiwork:** Handiwork is a practical exercise which tasks on the pupils' skills and artistry. It brings out a pupil's hidden talents and prepares him for future life's challenges. Unfortunately, commercialisation of education has sent it off the school system. In the olden school system managed by the government, handiwork was seen as a school subject. Pupils were trained through this means in making clay pots, baskets, mats, brooms, berets, handkerchiefs, textile wears etc. Some people grew with these skills and utilised them in fending for themselves and families later in their lives. Today, driven by profit-making, proprietors now demand toilet (tissue) papers, tablets of soap, bottles of dettol, detergents and or raw cash from pupils in lieu of their handicraft. This practice, no doubt, has kept the pupils lazy while heaping the bulk of the expenses on parents. Furthermore, it destroyed the technological, scientific and creative abilities of the nation's upcoming generations.

As the researchers have earlier stated, the ways of manipulating the system by these proprietors to maximally benefit cannot be fully exhausted in a work of this nature. In what follows, therefore, the researchers discuss the effects of commercialisation of primary education on the Nigeria's dwindling economy.

Effects of Commercialisation of Primary Education in Nigeria

It is already clear that most of the inhabitants of Nigeria live far below the world's rated poverty level. Amadi and Ekechi (2017:100) observed that “majority of the people cannot afford the basic human needs of food, shelter and clothing, not to talk of other equally important needs like good Medicare, sound education and so on”. Therefore, in such a dwindling, rather dwindled, economy coupled with high educational charges occasioned by commercialisation of primary education, many parents can no longer meet up with high educational charges occasioned by commercialisation of primary education many parents can no longer meet up with the financial obligations of their children's education. This ultimately leads to high level of primary school dropouts with its attendant negative effects on the entire nation.

Consequently, in the urban cities, it is very common to see under-aged children roaming the streets during school hours. Sometimes, they are left by their parents to hawk certain items like sachet (pure) water, bananas, groundnuts, gala, biscuits, soft drinks etc. in order to support the family income. Through this process, many of them grow wild – learn to disrespect the elders, get introduced to early sexual immoralities, engage in

stealing which metamorphose into armed-robbery and terrorism, become agents and accomplices to children traffickers etc. The scenario is not better in the rural areas. Many resort to hard drugs addiction, are indoctrinated to join murderous groups in the name of cultism etc. Some of these children (dropouts) equally fall prey to ritualists and so meet their untimely deaths.

Furthermore, the parents' unfaithfulness in paying the high charges levied by the proprietors of schools leads to their children being chased away from school most times. Hence, pupils lack the basic/foundation knowledge to progress to the post-primary level as a result of frequent absence from school. The extended effect is that these students constitute serious challenges to the educational givers at the secondary school level. Since they cannot cope, they become violent, disinterested and equally drop out, thus becoming social misfits to the detriment of overall national development.

Again, the pupils' lack of sound education leads to low or inadequate development of new skills, creative ingenuity and requisite positive attitude to lives' affairs which are necessary to both individual and national growth. In fact, commercialisation of education has led to deemphasis on crafts (handiwork) since the schools' proprietors monetise this. No doubt, this discouragement in the upcoming child from acquiring skills in technology, innovational attitudes and other virtues is inimical to national development.

The overcrowding of pupils in a school bus meant for few persons can pose health hazards. If one pupil has an ailment that is airborne, it can be easily transmitted to others, thereby spreading to the entire school. If the ailment is not properly handled or managed, it can lead to death. On the other hand, even if the ailment is not a life-threatening one, the parents bear the costs of treatment and medication. This, therefore, constitutes serious inconveniences to parents who cannot meet the basic needs in a recessed economy since they have to channel the little resources available to the treatment of their wards at the expense of other equally pressing needs. This surely affects development and impacts negatively on the dwindling economy.

Commercialisation of education has equally led to unproductiveness on the parts of the teachers. Since the proprietors target huge profits, they pay meager salaries to their teachers. Expectedly, the teachers are demoralised and so abandon their teaching and researching responsibilities for other commercial (private) activities. Some even indulge in sharp/corrupt practices within and outside the schools in order to carry out their necessary financial obligations. Since the teachers, and others alike, no longer engage in meaningful researches and intensive studies that could proffer solutions to some national problems, the Nigerian economy will continue to suffer.

Conclusion

This work underlines education as a veritable instrument to the development of an individual in particular and the Nigerian nation at large. The foundation of all facets of education is laid at the earlier stages of the individual's life, hence primary education becomes paramount. Unfortunately, commercialisation of primary education, with the
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attendant high fees structure imposed on it by the proprietors, has made it difficult for the necessary basic education to be realised. This is so because many parents can no longer afford the high costs of primary education in the Nigeria's dwindling economy. As many children, rather youths, drop out of school, they lose necessary skills required of them to soar high in life. In fact, they develop negative attitudes about themselves and viable national projects and infrastructures. No doubt, such posture definitely retards national growth. Therefore, it behoves the Nigerian government to tackle the bull by its horns by taking over completely the sponsorship, management and supervision of primary education. This will go a long way to reviving the nation's dwindling economy.

Recommendations

In view of the foregoing, the researchers make the following recommendations:

1. Since the current privatisation of primary education is inimical to national development, government should completely take over the sponsorship and management of primary education and further abolish the laws enabling its privatisation so that no further private schools would be established at that level.
2. In the mean time, Nigerian government should set up a committee that will re-screen private primary schools that are already operational in the country. The aim is to ascertain their qualification in terms of environment, basic/necessary educational infrastructures, quality of teaching and learning, etc. Those who do not qualify should immediately be scrapped.
3. For those who qualify, government should determine the legitimate fees and the amount to be paid by parents. In addition to that, the proprietors should be made to nullify the multiplicity of uniforms, kits, books etc. and allow parents to buy these items in the open market. This will reduce the high costs of primary education thereby, making it possible for majority of the people to partake in it.
4. As soon as government takes over the responsibility of providing primary education for the citizenry, she should make it compulsory for every child and mandate parents to join in ensuring compliance. This way, every child will be liberated from ignorance and savagery and so matures to contribute to national development.
5. Handiwork should be made compulsory in primary schools, even as a subject, since it promotes skills acquisition and other creative ingenuities in the young ones. All forms of its monetisation should be totally stopped.
6. Finally, effective routine monitoring and supervision should be undertaken by the government for both the government-sponsored schools and the few qualified and rules-compliant private schools. This will keep the standard of education alive and guarantee genuine training of Nigeria's upcoming youths for effective national development.

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